



# FACT SHEET

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### BARRY M. GOLDWATER RANGE COMPLEX

The Barry M. Goldwater Complex is a vast training range for U.S. and allied pilots. The range consists of 1.9 million acres of relatively undisturbed Sonoran Desert southwest of Luke Air Force Base between Yuma and Tucson south of Interstate 8. Overhead are 57,000 cubic miles of airspace where pilots practice air-to-air maneuvers and engage simulated battlefield targets on the ground. Roughly the size of Connecticut, the immense size of the complex allows for simultaneous training activities on nine air-to-ground and two air-to-air ranges. The Luke Air Force Base Range Management Office manages the eastern range activities and Marine Corps Air Station Yuma oversees operations on the western portion.

More than 50 aircrews and aircraft can simultaneously operate on the range while performing many independent training missions. The range complex is the nation's second largest military reservation and has been used by military pilots since September 1941. The range complex is not a permanent military reservation-- Congress periodically approves the land to be withdrawn from normal public uses, such as mining, ranching, farming and agriculture, since these activities are incompatible with the military mission.

The range is within the unrefueled flight radius of 12 military installations and the U.S. Pacific fleet carriers. Combat pilots from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force—active duty, Guard and Reserve—use it to hone their skills. All of the F-15E and A-10 aircrews and half of the F-16 pilots that flew during the Gulf War were trained on the Goldwater Range. Most of the Navy's F-18 and Marine Corps' AV-8 pilots trained on the range as well. Its unpopulated expanse and superb flying weather allows pilots to safely push their airplanes to the limit. Pilots fly more than 68,000 sorties in the range annually.

Nearly 60 years of military training has insulated the range from intensive human intrusion. Only about six percent of the land is intensively used for roads, targets and support areas. The remaining 94 percent is relatively undisturbed Sonoran Desert which thrives under natural conditions. Flora and fauna thrive and the archaeological record of 10,000 years of human activities lies mostly undisturbed. Together, the Goldwater Complex, the Pinacate Biosphere Reserve in Sonora and the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument make up the largest unfragmented protected area in Mexico or the US outside of Alaska.

Military users drop live ordnance on five pinpoint targets, however 98 percent of the weapons dropped in the complex are inert practice bombs. Most of the land is a safety buffer for low-flying fighter aircraft. The safety zones provide refuge-like conditions for the animals, including a number of protected and endangered species, such as the Sonoran pronghorn antelope, cactus ferruginous pygmy owl, flat-tailed horned lizard, and lesser long-nosed bat.

Natural and cultural resource protection is an important part of the Department of Defense use of the range. As responsible stewards of the lands entrusted to the Air Force, Range Management Office employs an environmental team to protect the habitat included within the boundaries of the complex. Staff biologists and archaeologists, specifically trained in the ecology and culture of southwestern Arizona, have developed comprehensive programs to monitor protected species like the Sonoran pronghorn antelope and to inventory native American cultural sites inside the range's boundaries.

Before dropping live high explosive bombs on designated impact areas, biologists are sent to ensure there are no pronghorn within five kilometers of a target. If there are animals present, missions are either redirected or canceled.

Although tight Air Force controls have limited public access and kept the proliferation of off-road vehicles from damaging the fragile desert landscape, most of the range complex can be visited by obtaining a permit. There are several visitor regulations associated with obtaining a permit. These are designed to help protect personal safety of visitors while protecting natural and cultural resources on the range. For instance, all vehicles must remain on existing roads at all times. Regulations require each adult 18 years or older have their own permit in their possession while on the range and must call before they enter and after they depart the range. Permits can be obtained from the Range Offices at Gila Bend Air Force Auxiliary Field and Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and the Bureau of Land Management offices in Yuma and Phoenix.

### **GILA BEND AIR FORCE AUXILIARY FIELD**

The Gila Bend AFAF is located 65 miles southwest of Luke and four miles south of the town of Gila Bend, in the Sonoran Desert of southwest Arizona. The airfield encompasses 1,885 acres of land in southwest Maricopa County, east of Highway 85. Gila Bend AFAF includes an 8,500-foot runway for fixed-wing aircraft and a heliport.

Its primary mission is to support the Barry M. Goldwater Range Complex. Nine bombing and gunnery ranges, scattered within the 2 million-acre facility, are used by all branches of the military for conducting air-to-air and air-to-surface tactical training. Military aircraft, primarily F-16s, A-10s and Army National Guard helicopters, routinely use Gila Bend AFAF for practicing traffic pattern and emergency simulated engine flameout procedures. The airfield is also used for emergency and precautionary recoveries of military aircraft that experience malfunctions on the range.

[Barry M. Goldwater Map](#)